

New quest examines JFK assassination mystery

Panel has mandate from Congress

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nearly 31 years after John F. Kennedy's assassination, investigators armed with a mandate from Congress are beginning a new quest to learn what the federal government's files can tell them about the case.

At its first hearing yesterday, the new Assassinations Records Review Board was told the investigation was marked with "secrecy, deceit, obfuscation, rumors and innuendo," which contributed to a "corrosive decline" in Americans' trust of their government.

James Lesar, a Washington lawyer, said the board can restore the confidence of the American people "that they have a right to know their own history."

After 30 years, he said, "justifications for the continued withholding of such facts pale in comparison

with the need to end the mistrust.

President Kennedy was shot on Nov. 22, 1963 in Dallas, as he rode in an open car on a mission to mend political fences in the Texas Democratic Party.

Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested for the murder but was killed before he could be questioned extensively. An investigative commission headed by then-Chief Justice Earl Warren decided that Oswald acted alone.

Conspiracy theories flowered and continue to this day.

The board is charged by Congress to ferret out assassination-related documents from government files. All government records about Kennedy's murder, said the law, "should carry a presumption of immediate disclosure" and all should eventually be disclosed. Only in the rarest of cases is there any legitimate need for continued protection of such records," the law says.

The five-member board is chaired by John R. Tunheim, chief deputy attorney general of Minnesota, and includes two law professors, a professor of history and law and a li-

brarian specializing in rare books and special collections.

Government agencies were directed by the law, passed in 1992, to provide the National Archives with all records in their possession bearing on the assassination. The CIA and the FBI have sent hundreds of thousands of documents to the Archives, but thousands of others are being withheld or have been provided with huge sections blanked out.

It is the board's job to review whether documents should be made public and to find any others that are being withheld. The opening session was devoted to asking witnesses what the term assassination records means. "We hope to gather valuable public input into this important defini-

tion" and to develop a working definition, Mr. Tunheim said.

The American people believe, by an overwhelming majority, that there was a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy," said Mr. Lesar. "The American public believes that there has been a cover-up of the truth about the assassination, and I believe that, too. Unfortunately, there is no certainty, either in my mind or in the public mind, as to who the conspirators were."

Page Putnam Miller, representing the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, said among withheld documents are 60 boxes of communications between the CIA and its station in Mexico City, which was visited by Oswald.

Dear Mr. Weirberg,
Here is a copy of the article
you requested. It was in the
Evening Sun on October 12th 1994
Section A, page 13. I'd like to
hear what you think of it,
whether you think anything will
come out of it or not.
Looking forward to your lecture
on the 18th.
Thanks,

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